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## [What does a Navy Hospital Corpsman know about the Heart?](#)

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**By Lt. Louis Streb, RN, MSN, Instructor, Basic Medical Technician Corpsman Program, Medical Education and Training Campus**

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Marines know when they're sent to the front lines, a U.S. Navy corpsman will be right there with them. Hospital corpsmen, better known as 'DOC,' are Navy enlisted basic medical specialists under the added pressure of providing medical care in the field or anywhere else the Navy decides!



Navy and Air Force students in the Basic Medical Technician Corpsman Program conduct basic life support skills training during a BLS course at the Medical Education and Training Campus. Photo by Lisa Braun.

### **Where it all begins**

The Basic Medical Technician Corpsman Program (BMTCP) is a 14-week introductory course in the delivery of medical care. These young men and women are provided formal education and training that develops them into entry-level medical technicians and corpsmen within fixed and deployable medical facilities. They receive instruction on medical terminology, anatomy & physiology, Basic Life Support (BLS), Emergency Medical Technician-Basic curricula, as well as various aspects of nursing and primary patient care to include:

1. Nutrition
2. Cardiac life support
3. First aid procedures
4. Infection control
5. Universal precautions
6. Vital signs
7. Intravenous care
8. Wound care management
9. History taking and physical assessment
10. Customer service

### **What about the heart**

Corpsmen get a crash course on the cardiovascular, or circulatory system, which consists of the heart, blood, and blood vessels. They start with key terms such as atria, ventricle, artery, vein, capillary, red and white blood cells, plasma, blood pressure, hypertension, pacemaker, and shock.

Students learn that the heart is a muscle about the size of your fist, located in the center of the chest; that it has four chambers, responsible for pumping blood through the heart, past multiple valves, and out to the body via blood vessels; and that these vessels are described by their function, location and whether they carry blood away from or to the heart.

### **But wait there's more**



Seaman Christopher Hawthorne, a student in the Basic Medical Technician Corpsman Program, is evaluated by Lt. Louis Streb while being tested on his ability to assess fellow student, Airman 1st Class Kendra Labonte in the Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) Medical Assessment practicum. Photo by Lisa Braun

Corpsmen must also understand that the heart does not work alone. It is paired closely with the lungs, and one without the other leads to death. The functions and effects of these two systems are so intertwined that they are often referred to as the cardiopulmonary system. It becomes crystal clear that the main purpose of the heart is to deliver oxygen and nutrients to all the body's organs such as the brain, kidneys, eyes, liver, and, skin.

It is because of this newly obtained knowledge and hands-on training that our hospital corpsmen are then able to identify and treat the following cardiac emergencies:

- Coronary artery disease
- Aneurysm
- Dysrhythmia
- Angina pectoris
- Acute myocardial infarction (heart attack)
- Congestive heart failure
- Cardiac arrest

### **A student's perspective**





Seaman Luke Wagner, a student in the Basic Medical Technician Corpsman Program, conducts basic life support (BLS) skills training during a BLS course at the Medical Education and Training Campus. Photo by Lisa Braun.

As a BMTCP instructor, registered nurse, and prior hospital corpsman myself, I could go on and on about the effectiveness of the training students receive in our program. But I think a student's perspective speaks volumes:

*"What I already knew about the heart is that without it we would die. What I didn't understand was how it was like a pump, automatic at first but when necessary could be ran manually." ~ Navy student 2016*

*"Something which I found extremely interesting was that when you have a myocardial infarction it actually kills a little bit of your heart muscle. That bit of the heart is now incapable of ever functioning again and now the rest of the heart is having to compensate for normal productivity". ~ Navy student 2016*

*"I learned that early defibrillation of a patient in cardiac arrest is the most important factor in determining their survival". ~ Navy student 2016*

*"Patient education is key to preventing cardiovascular disease. It is our duty to help patients understand that smoking, high cholesterol, hypertension, obesity, diabetes, and physical activity are modifiable risk factors". ~ Recent BMTCP graduate 2016*

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